

THE LAYPERSON AS THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Recommended Time: 30 minutes

I. Orientation

The ideal of grace is not lived in isolation but in community. This talk is a call to be living and active members of the Christian community. By grace we were incorporated into the family of God through our baptism.

God has a marvelous plan of salvation. It is not ancient history. God still acts. His plan of salvation is for us today. The Church is the body of Christ in today's world.

In the Bible the Church is described in living images. Key concepts of this talk are that the Church is the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27) and the Church is God's own people. (I Peter 2:9-10) We are conscious and responsible parts of the Church. As the body of Christ, we are the hands, feet, eyes, and ears of Jesus, intent on making others aware of God's presence in the world.

All the baptized (clergy and laity) are the Church. Together we have a unity in our mission though there is a diversity of functions. We all have responsibilities that come from our call from God in baptism.

The main points to be made in this talk are:

- Christ did not intend merely to save individuals but to save the world. For this reason He founded the Church to continue His mission to the world.
- As members of the Church, the laity have a specific mission to the world and in the world to be fully Christian.
- Because a person's life is changed, s/he is to penetrate and transform society through the power of the gospel.

II. General Comments

This talk presents the concept of laypersons as the Church in the world as the apostolic ideal. It presents the mission of the Church in the world and each person's part in that mission. It should awaken in us an enthusiasm for Christian action. This talk provides the framework for the rest of the lay talks, which develop a concrete picture of how to be a Christian leader (an apostle) in the Church (a Christian community impacting environments).

This is the third talk of the Via de Cristo weekend. The first talk, (Ideal), explained the need to have an ideal, something to live for that is adequate for our lives. The second talk, (Grace), presented the Christian ideal - the life of grace, a living relationship with God. The Layperson as the Church in the World grows out of these first two talks, and it considers how the Christian ideal can be made effective in the world. It shows the layperson how a concern for the world and its problems and a desire to share the life of grace with all people are part of the Christian ideal. The living out of this Christian ideal involves drastically changing the world.

This talk presents the vision of God's plan for the world and the necessary role of the layperson in that plan. It presents God's call to the participants and explains how living out the Christian ideal is meant to be part of our everyday experience of life. God has a place for each one of us in His scheme of building His kingdom and expects each Christian to participate and do the tasks that He gives him/her to accomplish.

The remaining lay talks of the Via de Cristo build upon this one. They outline a

program for each participant to follow in finding an effective place in the mission of the Church in the world. The later talks of Piety, Study and Apostolic Action will present a program for growing in effectiveness as a Christian apostle. Leaders sums up the Via de Cristo to that point by presenting the picture of what a lay apostle should be. The lay talks on Sunday outline an approach to apostolic action in the world. They present what we need to be effective Christians and show the need for each of us to be active Christians by reaching out to others.

The main idea of The Layperson as the Church in the World talk is the importance of lay people in the Church's mission. It is not primarily a talk on the Church or a talk on the state of our society. It is easy to get the talk off track by giving too much information about the Church or too detailed a story of the layperson's role as a Church member. The Church should be presented in its apostolic or missionary dimension so the participant can see that being an apostle is part of living as a baptized member of the Church. The role of the lay person is to have an active part in the mission of the Church. We are members of the Church and, therefore, have a God-given apostolic responsibility. This talk has a very specific function, but it does not say everything a Christian should know about either the nature of the Church or the role of the layperson.

III. Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the Via de Cristo weekend at this point is often more intellectual than heartfelt. The discussion will have picked up after the talk on Grace, but it is still an exchange of ideas. We have probably not yet reached their hearts.

Most will have begun to participate in the discussion, but some may still be holding back. The ways the members of the group interact with each other have not yet been established, i.e., who will talk and when.

The Ideal talk may have disturbed many of them, but the Grace talk probably had a calming effect by presenting God's all-encompassing love. The Layperson as the Church in the World may again disturb many participants because it points out the tremendous responsibility given each one of us through our call from God in baptism.

IV. Suggestions for Writing this Talk

This talk should be lively and vital. The key to presenting this talk is that it should not be a profound theological discourse. The participants do not need a lot of theory but need to be aware of the importance of God's call in their lives.

This talk presents a vision of God's call to them and their purpose as Christians. The speaker should show a feeling of excitement over having a unique part in building God's kingdom, a part that cannot be done by anyone else.

The speaker should avoid too much theory, complexity or theological issues. These cannot be dealt with adequately in this talk. They may have the counter-effect of preventing the participants from confronting themselves. The speaker should demonstrate the importance and excitement of our calling rather than a detailed analysis.

The first day of the weekend is very general, and the approach is not on a personal level. At this point the participants are wary of any attempt to change them, so the speaker should be careful not to tell them how to be an apostle but sketch out the attractiveness and the greatness of Christ's ideal for the world.

This is not a witness talk, but the speaker should give examples. This talk should

clearly explain two things. First, the Church was created to bring all people to Christ. Second, each person has a part in the mission of the Church as an active witness in the world. Thus, when we accept Jesus as Savior, we have an obligation to bring Christ to those around us. This is expanded in the talks that follow.

The speaker should stick to the points in the outline and develop them effectively. This talk should give witness to the importance of the way of Christ and the life of an apostle, a “sent one.” The speaker must be careful of the kinds of examples used. It is good to show in stories the need people have for Christ and the importance of our call as apostles. It is good to convey what that calling means to the speaker but not to illustrate how to be an apostle in the way that the Apostolic Action and The Study and Evangelization of the Environment talks will. The emphasis is on the call to be an apostle in the world. The speaker should avoid use of personal witness.

One of the key points is the wide scope of the calling of the laity. Many of the participants will understand their call as doing “church things” to the point of not hearing their call to be apostles to the world. This misunderstanding can be avoided if the vision of transforming the world is clearly presented and understood during this talk. The speaker may want to leave the participants with a leading question regarding the place of their call in their everyday lives.

THE LAYPERSON AS THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

The great problem of today is that people are not living as a family - God’s family.

II. GOD’S PLAN FOR THE WORLD

- A. Our society is troubled by serious problems. Give brief examples, preferably from current news events.
- B. Human solutions have failed miserably in solving these problems. Give brief examples.
- C. These problems are only symptoms. The root of the world’s troubles lies in its separation from God.
- D. God works out His plan of salvation at a personal level and at the community level.
 1. The key to happiness for each person lies in Jesus Christ. Include the reading of Philippians 3:7-9 in the talk.
 2. The radical and only solution to the problems of the world lies in Jesus Christ when people live in the manner described in the Grace Talk. Include the reading of Ephesians 1:9-10 or Colossians 1:15-20 in the talk.
- E. The ideal of grace is not lived in isolation, but in community.

III. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

- A. It is not the buildings, but something alive, the people.
- B. It is not a religious social club with membership fees, but a gathering of God’s people, visible and spiritual at the same time.
- C. It is not a social service agency dispensing its bounty. We are all seated together at the table, sharing life.

- D. It does not exist just to serve its members.
- E. It is the same Christ today as the one in history, the body of Christ alive and real. (Hebrews 13:8, I Corinthians 12:27)
- F. It is the people of God who are the light, salt, and leaven of the world. (Matthew 5:13-16)
- G. It is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the disciples. It is the normal, desired, and visible fruit of this continuing activity (Acts 2:32). The Church is the reunion of those who believe that Jesus is Lord, those who hope and love through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the community of believers united in the spreading of hope, realizing the love of God and of people.
 - I am the Church.
 - You are the Church.
 - We are the Church, the body of Christ. We are all His children. We have been restored.

IV. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

- A. The mission of the Church is to evangelize the world. It was given to us by Jesus in the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20. This is the core mission of the Church and all of its members.

The Church evangelizes when its members seek, through the power of the God's word, to share Christ with others. When, by the power of the Holy Spirit, people accept Christ's invitation to come into their lives, their lives change. This affects those around them.
- B. Within this unity of mission there is a diversity of functions or ministries in the Church.
 - 1. Clergy: Pastors are ministers of the word and sacrament, teachers and enablers with the task of preparing believers for ministry to build up the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)
 - 2. Laity: Laypersons are witnesses, bringing Christ to all their environments. (I Corinthians. 4:1)

Some laypersons have leadership roles and some have special training such as lay missionaries, teachers and Associates in Ministry. We are all people of God, co-responsible for the unique mission of the Church. (I Corinthians. 12:12-14)
- C. We have been called to evangelize the world with the Christian message. This evangelizing function is not an accident or a luxury of the Christian life. This is the only true response to the call of God's grace to us.
- D. The redemptive work of Jesus extends to every aspect of life in the world. There is no other solution to the problems of the world.

V. THE SPECIFIC MISSION OF THE LAYPERSON

- A. The mission begins with our call in baptism and continues as we affirm that call. (Galatians 6:4, Matthew 22:39) It originates in the Biblical commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.

- B. It is exercised in the world.
- C. All of life is a mission field for the people of God.
 - 1. We proclaim the good news to the world by our personal Christian walk with God and by our fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 2. We believe the gospel and make it come alive by repenting and reforming our attitudes and lives.
 - 3. We transform the world around us by taking our own responsibility seriously to live out our faith and to be a visible witness.
 - 4. We can realize our human ideal and Christian ideal in the world and in the Church by conforming our lives to the image of Christ. This commitment extends to all areas of our lives - personal, family, professional, civic, socio-economic, political, etc.
- D. Lay persons are called to be saints and to make the world Christ-like. (Ephesians. 4:11-13)

VI. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LAITY'S MISSION

- A. It is personal and unique for each person.
- B. It is a community endeavor.
- C. It is the work of grace.
- D. It is being the Church in the world.
- E. It is apostolic - We are called to BE the Church.
 - 1. We are to witness, living Christian lives regardless of the consequences that brings.
 - 2. We are to be living instruments, allowing God to work through us in every situation in which He has placed us.

VII. CONCLUSION

- A. To be a Christian living in the world is to know how to change our freedom in Christ into a springboard from which we can go about transforming the world around us to be Christ-centered in every moment and within the normal flow of life.
- B. Laypersons are called to be saints in 20__ (current year), empowered by the Spirit, courageously moving out into the groups and structures of the world.
 - 1. Taking the marvelous realities of grace seriously.
 - 2. Living fully as God's children.
 - 3. Living fully as brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 4. Serving as temples of the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 3:16)
 - 5. Showing Christ in every part of our lives.
 - 6. Judging all the problems of life from a Christ-like perspective.
 - 7. Living in grace and by means of grace, and bearing that grace in our fragile, sinful selves. (II Corinthians 4:7)
 - 8. Expressing joy for God and joy for other people. (Philippians 4:4, 10)

CLARIFICATION OF THE OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Ideal talk, the participants were asked to consider what they are living for and whether it is leading them to true happiness. In the Grace talk, they were asked to consider a new ideal - God, and the new life of grace God offers, which provides the key to true happiness. This talk begins by making them look out to the whole world and its great problems. It relates what has been said so far to the whole of human life and points out that we are not living as God's family.

II. GOD'S PLAN FOR THE WORLD

- A. The ills of our society are all problems of relationships: between nations, between classes, between institutions, between individuals, or between an individual and any or all of the above. These relationships are usually based on self-interest rather than self-giving. The speaker should illustrate this briefly, perhaps with newspaper headlines.
- B. Humanity has placed its faith in technology, science and progress. It has based its happiness on its own collective efforts. These efforts have failed. Give brief examples.
- C. We have failed because society has treated only the symptoms, not the disease. The root of the world's troubles and relationship problems lies in people's separation from God. We live in a world that has turned its back on Jesus Christ.
- D. For this reason, humanity's attempts to cure these ills through collective human efforts alone are doomed to fail. For instance, one government program failed to cure poverty, so we developed program after program until we built a huge bureaucratic structure, but we have not improved the condition of the poor. Another example: laws and programs haven't cured the problem of crime, so we passed law after law until we have a prison system that is a national disgrace. Other brief examples can be used to illustrate the point that the world's solutions do not work.
- E. God works out His plan of salvation at a personal level and at a community level.
 1. A person can find true happiness by having a relationship with Jesus Christ. When living in God's will, a person is capable of having the peace that passes understanding.
 2. The answer to the problems of the world is Christ. This assertion could be described as the radical Christian position. There are few ways of emphasizing the importance of Christ more strongly than by saying that he is the answer to the problems of the world. This approach is sometimes described in literature as the triumphant view of Christianity. It is based on a conviction that in Christ there is power to renew the world. This power cannot be found anywhere else. Only the power of Christ can create fully self-giving relationships, and Christ is the only way the world can be transformed.

Such a position cannot be justified in simple terms, at least not without a great deal of argument. Even at that, the argument probably would not get very far. A person must experience what the power of Christ can do in his/her own life as well as in a group of people. S/he must experience the healing, restoring, and revitalizing action of Christ. Therefore, at this point,

the speaker just states the position. The participants will be convinced of it later, not by any argument presented in the later talks but by experiencing the presence and power of Christ during the weekend and by hearing the witnesses of the speakers as they present the power of Christ working in their own lives.

- F. The ideal of grace is lived in a community of believers who love and support each other.

III. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

This section describes several images of the church. These are not all of the models of the church, but they are the most important ones for picturing the layperson's role in the mission of the Church, which is the heart of the talk.

Sections A, B C and D are presented to overcome false images people may have of the Church. It is not necessary to elaborate.

- A. Some belong to a church because it has a nice building for weddings and funerals.
- B. Some belong to a church for social or professional status.
- C. Some belong to a church in order to do good things for others.
- D. Some people think the church exists only to serve them, their families and their needs.

Sections E, F and G are positive views of the Church that picture its role in the world, pointing to its mission to continue Christ's command to evangelize the world.

- E. This is the same Christ as the one who lived in history. The Church is presented as a community of believers (the body of Christ) whose natural response to God's love is to accept the life God offers. (Hebrews 13:8, I Corinthians 12:27)
- F. The Church seeks to further the kingdom of God to build it up. God's people are the light, salt and leaven for the world. (Matthew 5:13-16)
- G. "We are the Church" is important to the structure of the talk because the main line of thought in the talk is that the mission of the Church is to bring people to Christ and to change the world for Christ. Laypersons are members of the Church. Therefore, the mission of the Church is their mission, and they are called to take part in it.

IV. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

- A. The first part of this section presents the mission of the Church as a continuation of the mission begun by Christ. Jesus came to proclaim His kingdom. All of the aspects of Jesus' life, everything He did and said, were components of His evangelizing activity. Evangelization is the core of what the Church is about. Jesus said: "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. That is what I was sent to do." (Luke 4:43) We are to be like Christ. The Kingdom of God is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes secondary. The mission Christ gave his apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19-20) sums up the mission of the Church - to bring all people into the kingdom of God. We are to be like Christ. Accepting Christ changes lives and affects those around us
- B. Since "we are the Church" (the people of God), we each have a share in this

mission. Just as each part of the body has a specific function (an eye cannot hear nor an ear see) so each member of the Church has a specific function. We are all called to the mission of evangelism; we are given different ministries within that mission.

1. Clergy are to train, enable and build up the Christian community so it is able to engage in ministry to build up the body of Christ. Though the Church is to evangelize, it begins by being evangelized itself. The Church needs to listen constantly to what it must believe, to its reasons for hope, and to the commandment to love. Since the Church is immersed in the world and often tempted by the ideals of the world, it always needs to hear the proclamation of the mighty works of God. The primary role of the clergy is the ongoing renewal of the people of God, yet they also participate in the ministry of proclamation to the world at large.
2. The primary role of the layperson is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, a message that the world really needs to hear. The layperson's mission field is the vast and complicated domain of his/her environments: family, job, neighborhood, politics, society, economics, the world of culture, the sciences, the arts, international life, and the mass media, etc.

Some lay people are missionaries, teachers in the church, Associates in Ministry, etc. They are employed as full or part time Church personnel.

- C. The entire emphasis of this talk is to stress the importance of the laity in renewing the world. An idle believer is an oxymoron (a contradiction in terms). It is unthinkable that a person who has been saved and renewed by Christ would not respond by sharing this with others.
- D. The Church is important, not because of doctrine, congregations, programs, pastors, or bishops, but for the sake of Christ's mission to bring all humanity into a relationship with Him. (John 12:32) God formed the Church for the whole world. We are the people who are to extend the redemptive work of Jesus into all areas of our lives in the world. Jesus is the key to solving the problems of the world.

V. THE SPECIFIC MISSION OF THE LAYPERSON

This section is the heart of the talk. It is the first presentation of the vision of the mission of the laity. This talk should not tell how a person is to act, or what is to be done or how environments are to be changed. This talk presents the vision Christ gave to the laity through His body, the Church. The message will be repeated and expanded in later talks.

- A. When we are baptized, we receive a call from God to be His. When we affirm this and accept Christ, we respond to God's command to extend His love to people around us.
- B. As believers, we are to exercise our responsibility where we are in the world, no matter what the consequences.
- C. This section tells us that all of life is the mission field for lay people. It presents the vision of the tasks given the laity by Christ through His body, the Church.
 1. We proclaim the Good News to the world, but how to do it is not explained in detail at this time. This talk is not intended to tell a person how to act,

- what is to be done or how the environment is to be changed.
2. We believe the Good News of Christ, so we repent and reform our attitudes and lives. We work at becoming mature Christians.
 3. We will transform the world around us when we recognize the importance of the mission as our responsibility. When we respond to God's love by living our faith, our visible witness will affect others.
 4. We realize our human and Christian ideal by trying to be like Christ. It is when the believer tries to live in Christ's image that Christ's kingdom is built in the world. Our commitment to be Christ-like extends to all aspects of our lives.
- D. We are called to be saints, forgiven sinners, and to be channels of love for our neighbors. It is mainly through the lay person that ordinary people in society hear the gospel. It is often through a layperson that a non-Christian comes in contact with Christ, hears the message of Christ, and can feel the call to grow and to fulfill God's vision for them. The clergy do not have the same type of contacts that each layperson has, for the clergy are not present in all situations and environments. Laypersons and clergy need to work together.

This section should be stated with excitement, for it is a great vision and ideal for which to strive. This vision is one given to us by Christ. Therefore, the potential exists that we can achieve His goals if we, as His servants, have faith and courage and a Christ-like attitude. (Matthew 25:40)

VI. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LAITY'S MISSION

This section briefly outlines the vision, the style, and the breadth of the lay ideal.

- A. The Christian ideal for the layperson is presented here. The mission is unique to each person (believer). The layperson is the bearer of Christ's message. S/he is restless to live according to his/her faith and anxious that the rest of society lives it also. S/he is a prophet of salvation, one who teaches or proclaims God's word. This is not a vague "call to action" but a specific call for each person to live his/her life vibrantly for Christ. Every action and interpersonal relationship is to be lived as Christ desires. Each believer should recognize his/her role as a prophet in our world. Just as an Old Testament prophet was unable to keep from proclaiming the message he'd been given, each believer should be eager to share his/her joy and hope in God with all other people.
- B. However, the believer is not a lone voice crying in the wilderness but is a part of the whole body of Christ. Each Christian carries and shares his/her tasks in the world with others. We sustain one another and work together to challenge the goals and ideals of society. Lay people together live in the world as light, salt and leaven. They are the Church, active and committed members of God's prophetic group.

This topic is repeated and expanded many times in other talks, but it forms an important point in this talk because some participants may be getting nervous about having to preach or be "thrown to the wolves" of society. Thus, it is important to show that the person is not alone but is part of a larger group, a community striving for the same general goal.

- C. Above all, the mission is a work of grace. It is grace being lived fully today. It

is God's life and love overflowing in all situations we touch. It is God's free gift, active in the lives of the laity in the world, affecting the circumstances of life so that the kingdom is built up.

- D. The Christian is called to be a visionary. Each Christian, through the gift of baptism, is given the great gift of knowing the hope of God. S/he forms the link between God and the rest of society and is given the challenge to let God come alive through his/her actions and relationships with other people. The vision s/he is asked to share is the greatest miracle of all--God's desire to link Himself with each person. Each of us, as a member of the Church, walks united in obedience and freedom, initiative and collaboration, with those whom the Holy Spirit has moved to transform the world. What an ideal to live! What a joy to share!
- E. This mission is apostolic. It calls and sends each Christian to share in the apostolic mission of witnessing and calling the world back to God.
 - 1. This is not just a task apart from our everyday lives. To be authentic and convincing, it must emanate from the core of the Christian's being, his/her spirit, regardless of the consequences.
 - 2. This final thought in Section VI is one of the most important points of the entire talk. We are not called to all kinds of activity in the name of Jesus Christ. We are called to BE Christians (living instruments) wherever God has placed us, and to allow our Christian actions and beliefs to be the example and guide for a profoundly better world.

VII. CONCLUSION

This is a summary of the talk. It is a call to all of the participants to recognize the vision God is offering them.

- A. The vision of God's ideal for the world is offered to each baptized believer. The ultimate gift from God to the believer is that s/he is offered the potential to participate, in partnership with God, in the furthering of His kingdom. God has chosen to realize His kingdom through humanity. Without humanity the kingdom will not be realized. The most beautiful part of it is that, as we live our ordinary lives in a God-centered way, our lives become part of the work of the kingdom. God uses us to transform the world around us.
- B. Christians are called to live our lives as modern-day saints. We are to seriously attempt to live a life of love and self-giving and recognize our relationship with Christ, with one another and with all people around us. Christians accept the role of being a channel for God to those around us. We are people who love God, one another and life. We are people who radiate this love to all, letting our hope and trust in God shine like a beacon of joy and hope to the world.